

Notes on Meeting with Michael Ancram, MP

15/9/93

Michael Ancram's main objective for the meeting was to define the various points discussed at last years talks according to the following categories:

- 1) "bankable"
- 2) "contingently bankable"
- 3) "remotely bankable"
- 4) not acceptable at all

He asked for the Alliance Party representative to categorize the issues in terms of those four options. He also stated a desire to know what was Dr. Alderdice's estimation of the other parties' opinions.

Michael Ancram's stated goal was to obtain an idea of the areas of difference and of the bridges which could be built between them. The Minister also wished to know "Where we stand within Northern Ireland and within the framework of the three Strands."

A discussion ensued regarding the number of representatives the delegations were to be allowed. The Minister was non-committal about the numbers, but all participants agreed most emphatically about "deliverability" being essential.

The Minister's view of the three Strands indicated some desire to highlight relations between the UK and the Republic of Ireland and also Northern Ireland and the Republic.¹

The unofficial agenda followed by Mr. Ancram included these points (Alliance responses are indicated by A-):

STRAND 1

- The creation of an elected unicameral assembly
A-acceptable in principle

¹ The importance of this to Mr. Ancram and any new talks was unclear.

- Executive and/or legislative responsibilities
 - A-preferable to draw the executive from the legislature
 - A-does not object to separation of powers, provided problems extant are solved

- Range of subjects
 - 1973 range is considered the minimum acceptable by Alliance and also seemingly by Mr. Ancram
 - A-suggests the following may be added to agenda:
 - A-revenue raising powers of new government
 - A-relations with Europe of new government
 - A-cross-border cooperation. example: creation of a "mini-Irish Interpol"
 - Is security likely to be discussed on the first day?
 - A-no

- Are the executive responsibilities to be discharged through the legislature?
 - A-no answer within categories, but did specify a desire to change the current structure of 6 departments. example: a Ministry of Justice to be established early, with limited jurisdiction which will expand with time

- Heads of department to be drawn from the legislature
 - A-certainly

- Is the legislature to exercise its power through committees?
 - A-respond as contingently bankable
 - A-in favour of the departments being run by their heads, who are charged with giving an account of themselves to the committees, as opposed to direction from the committees
 - A-note the following objections to direction from committee:
 - 1) committees are cumbersome
 - 2) heads of departments should be able to link with their counterparts in the Republic
 - 3) minority heads of department may be bound by majority committees, removing some protection for minorities
 - both parties agree on proportionate representation. which Alliance highlights

- A point regarding the Prime Minister, to which Alliance agrees. The nature of the point is unclear

- A-Proposed by the unionists: a General purpose and Finance Committee to be drawn from the chairmen of committees.

- ratification for decisions from relevant assemblies North and South
- A-council to receive its authority from the domestic legislatures
- what is the price for Alliance's agreement on delegated powers

STRAND 3

- Roles of Articles II and III
 - A-status of Articles II and III are of considerable importance
 - change to aspirations versus claims
 - A-will agree if it can be guaranteed to pass
 - what can be offered to the other parties
 - A-Unionists would say: "burglar is now friend"
 - A-for the Republic, cooperative North-South bodies
 - A-concern that an agreement may be unconstitutional in the Republic of Ireland because it would require recognition of the North
 - Simultaneous referendum (North and South) to ratify agreement
 - A-a referendum could mean that the citizens of the Republic would hold a de facto veto on Northern Ireland's internal government
- Tripartite council
 - A-acceptability depends upon the powers of the regional government

Sir Ancram finished by asking for estimates of the trade-offs the other parties would be willing to accept, and indicated that these initial talks were designed to establish an idea of the negotiating positions expected. He gave an approximate time of six weeks for the first rounds of meetings, and strongly hinted at furthering the talks before the European elections.

GP&F and is expected to function as an executive. Under Alliance proposals it would be a power sharing executive

- Does the legislature require majority support? Straight vs. weighted majority
 - A-weighting is a requirement as well as proportionate representation and is vital because it is a protection for minorities
 - legislature required to have a straight majority for some areas and a weighted majority for others
 - A-in principle OK, but has not seen a workable scheme

- Allocation of committee chairmen
 - A-should be due to party strength, excluding those supporting violence

- Bill of Rights and Community Rights
 - unamendable by legislature
 - A-suggests adoption of the European Convention

- From where do the chairmen and/or heads of department draw their authority
 - general response from both participants indicates from the legislature

- Structure of the Panel of Commissioners. The following have been proposed by various institutions:
 - 1) No Panel (A)
 - 2) 6: 3 elected and 3 external (Hume SDLP)
 - 3) 3 elected members
 - A-option 2 is not acceptable, and suspicion is warranted in consideration of option 3 as it appears to be proposed for political gain only.
 - A greater number of elected commissioners is preferable (eg. 6)
 - what powers should such a panel hold
 - A-none of significance
 - at what price would Alliance accept a troika
 - A-necessary to have a regional assembly with legislative powers and a panel with constrained powers

STRAND 2

- How far would Alliance go on North-South delegated powers
 - A-pessimistic about delegated powers
 - A-believes that the best situation is the creation of cooperative North-South institutions
 - council to be autonomous or to require separate ratification from the legislatures
 - A-preference is for council to have to seek

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

It is clear that these meetings are very exploratory and are meant only to "test the waters". Sir Ancram seems very eager to establish areas of compromise. The tactic of individual meetings with the parties to establish the platforms of the parties is sound, however the format of the meetings has the danger of solidifying the positions of the parties early. Given the egos which seem to drive some of the parties, they may take it that their answers carry some weight, although the Minister wants to make it clear the meetings are non-committal.

I expect that some areas of discord will become apparent, where one or more of the parties will use conflicting categories. This information can be used to prepare alternative proposals. It may be helpful, from a view of making points, for Alliance to prepare a chart with all of the Ancram points and the expected responses of the other parties. Alliance will then be able to provide Sir Ancram with important information and may be in a position to lead with alternative suggestions. At the very least some idea of the range of expected reactions and bargaining chips should be developed.

The timetable presented, the eagerness of Sir Ancram and interpretation of the approaches to the Prime Minister of other parties indicate a short window of opportunity and a hopeful one.